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ABSTRACT

The linguistic, communicative, and cultural value of teaching Esperanto is discussed. A major linguistic advantage is that Esperanto study provides an ideal introduction to the study of language. The European root stock provides an important resource for building vocabulary in English and in other European languages. Esperanto has a valuable and unusual literature, comprising both translations from national languages and original work. This provides a valuable tool to promote cultural awareness. There are increasing numbers of North American schools and colleges which offer Esperanto. In addition, a fairly wide selection of materials suitable for school and college Esperanto courses are available. (RW)

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THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF ESPERANTO STUDY: AN AMERICAN VIEW

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Bruce Arne Sherwood

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There is increasing awareness in educational, business, and governmental circles that Americans are seriously handicapped by a lack of knowledge of foreign languages. In the last few years there has been a great deal of discussion of the problem, sparked in part by the activities of a President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies during the Carter Administration. Many people agree that it is important to restore and revitalize language study in our schools. However, there is considerable confusion as to just which languages should be taught. In particular, should our young people now be encouraged to study Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Swahili, and Arabic? Should such study be in addition to or as a substitute for the traditional study of Spanish, French, German and Latin? While French in Canada and Spanish in the United States have special importance, it isn't clear which other languages to emphasize. How do we choose? By what criteria?

This essay will analyze a novel option which offers unique linguistic, communicative, and cultural advantages in providing both depth and breadth in the language program and in heightening the internationality of the curriculum: the teaching of Esperanto. The nature, status, and cultural aspects of Esperanto have been well described in two recent books (Eichholz & Eichholz 1982; Forster 1982). I will

Esperanto Documents describe the work, organization, culture and history of the movement for the adoption of the International Language Esperanto as a second language for international use. They are published in Esperanto, English and French.

The series replaces those documents of the Centre for Research and Documentation on the Language Problem which dealt with the Esperanto movement.

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discuss how these aspects of the language make Esperanto an exceptionally appealing subject for a one-year course in our schools and colleges.

Linguistic advantages

Esperanto study provides an ideal introduction to the study of language. The benefits of starting with Esperanto can be seen from a major study of Esperanto teaching in American high schools and colleges, carried out at Columbia Teachers College under the direction of the noted educator and psychologist Edward Thorndike (Language Learning 1933). This research project concluded that *one* year of college Esperanto was equivalent to *four* years of college French or German in terms of mastery level. Because of its special properties (regularity, invariant roots, phonetic writing), a student can quickly reach a level of mastery which permits oral and written creativity, very little blocked by the arbitrary kinds of constraints common to national languages. This rapid achievement is in contrast to the long period of study of national languages required before much can be done with the new language, and this provides not only early gratification and stimulation, but early consideration of such advanced topics as style and usage standards.

The relative isolation of most Americans from direct experiences with foreign languages means that children and their parents often have no real conception of what a language is. It makes sense to introduce the notion of language in an easily manageable context, one which illustrates the important aspects common to many languages, uncluttered by the specific arbitrary features of individual national languages. For example, the notion of case is rather foreign to the English speaker. The case structures of German or Russian have so many irregularities and complex patterns that the concept itself is not well illustrated (for example, different classes of Russian nouns have different forms of the accusative, and sometimes the accusative has the same form as the nominative). Esperanto on the other hand has just two cases (nominative and accusative), and the distinction is simply that the accusative always adds "*-n*". The *form* of the case marking could not be simpler, thus making the *concept* stand out. There are many examples of this kind, in which Esperanto can be viewed as a kind of model ideally suited to clear expositions of linguistic concepts. Another aspect likely to provide important benefits for later

study of English and of foreign languages is the explicitness of parts of speech and syntax resulting from the grammatical endings which mark Esperanto nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verb forms.

One might worry that Esperanto study is "too easy" and therefore not a worthy subject for bright students. On the contrary, learning any language well, even Esperanto, requires hard work. The difference rather is in how far one can go for the same amount of hard work. The clarity with which Esperanto displays the structure of language may be compared with the clarity of using Arabic rather than Roman numbers for studying arithmetic, or the simplicity and phonetic associations of the Roman alphabet as compared with Chinese ideographs in learning to read. Also, depth of study can come from early involvement with the interesting body of Esperanto literature.

The European root-stock provides an important resource for building vocabulary in English and in other European languages. German and French teachers at my daughter's high school remarked with pleasure on her report cards that she often recognized and analyzed new words and structures thanks to her knowledge of Esperanto. The non-European aspects of Esperanto, particularly its word-forming by combining of invariant roots, might be of assistance in preparing for the study of some non-European languages, although I know of no research on this point. Statistical measurements based on standard "language universals" show that in word-formation Esperanto is most similar to agglutinative languages such as Turkish (Brozović 1976).

Some experiments have indicated that one year of Esperanto study followed by three years of the study of a national language yields a better mastery of the national language than four years of that language alone. The Columbia study mentioned above contains some data on this point. A British study (Halloran 1952) demonstrates this for French in the case of less talented students. Recent measurements in Europe have been summarized by Sonnabend (1979). These experiments should be repeated in North American settings, but these outcomes are not surprising given the understanding of the nature of languages gained through the study of Esperanto.

It used to be that Latin played the role of providing pupils with a sound linguistic education, and recently there has been some revival of interest in the use of Latin for this purpose. Leaving aside for a mo-

ment the obvious differences in cultural content, it seems clear that Esperanto is a far better choice for the task of introducing the notion of language, simply because it exemplifies the basic aspects of language so much more cleanly and quickly. As for the cultural aspects, Latin offers treasures of a very special sort, different from those provided by the study of modern languages. Yet Esperanto has the advantage of being a modern language and being global rather than European in certain important characteristics.

Some historical perspective may be useful here. About a hundred years ago the Modern Language Association of America was founded. A major goal was to educate the public to realize that the cultural value of studying French or German was not *inferior* to that of classical Latin and Greek but *different*, and that the educational and cultural values of the modern languages had to be judged on the basis of new criteria. The Modern Language Association in no way wished to abolish the study of the classical languages but insisted that the modern languages also could play an important role in schools and colleges. Similarly today, the value of Esperanto study should be understood without prejudice, on its own merits, and an introduction to Esperanto would no doubt stimulate the later study of national languages.

Where possible, it might make sense to teach Esperanto during the year just preceding high school, to give all the students a common linguistic preparation for the later study of national languages (and English). If earlier studies can be verified, that time invested in Esperanto is more than paid back in later work, it might also be feasible in a four-year high school to combine one year of first-year Esperanto with three years of national language and yet reach fourth-year levels of achievement in the national language, thus attaining equivalent or better foreign language learning but with the added benefits of Esperanto study.

Esperanto culture

Esperanto has a valuable and unusual literature, both translations from national languages and original works. The translated prose and poetry is interesting in having been in most cases translated by native speakers of the source material, in often preserving better the form as well as the content of the original work, and in representing much more equitably the many cultures of the world than is the case

in most national languages. For excellent discussions of these matters, see Auld (1982) and Hoeksema (1981).

Translations of literary works into English are heavily biased toward French, German, and Russian sources, while the body of translated Esperanto literature draws rather equally from everywhere, including the smaller cultures such as Finnish and Bulgarian. Books written originally in Esperanto have also come from around the world and include a wide range of genres, though drama has been little developed due to the dispersed nature of the Esperanto-speaking community. Original poetry has reached a more mature state than prose, though there do exist some first-rate novels. In addition to high literature, there also exist children's books, detective novels, travel books, popular science, etc. It is unfortunate that the Esperanto literature is almost completely unknown outside its own community. This is typical of small-scale literatures in the world, including such vigorous literatures as, say, that of Hungary (which however is well represented in Esperanto translation). At present, from fifty to a hundred books of some literary merit appear each year.

I might specifically mention some of the Esperanto literature I have particularly enjoyed. *Vojaĝo al Kazohinio* by the Hungarian Sándor Szathmári describes a modern Gulliver's conflicts and confusions in a totally rational society, contrasted with his later problems in a totally irrational society (but one which mirrors our own). *La Granda Kaldrono* is a long novel by the British John Francis which follows the linked fates of several young Scots in the two world wars, using an intricate time parallelism to interweave their histories. An older work recently reprinted is *Metropoliteno* by the Soviet writer Vladimir Varankin which describes the tumult around a young engineer involved with the Moscow subway, with both time and space handled with experimental verve (an English translation is available). Prose other than novels which I found delightful include the British Cezaro Rossetti's *Kredu min, Sinjorino*, a semi-autobiographical tale of a huckster of waterless cookware; the delicate detective story *Mistero Minora* of the Hungarian Ferenc Szilagyi; and a set of fine sketches of Tokyo life, *Mozaiko Tokio*, by Yagi.

The works just mentioned were all written originally in Esperanto. Of the translated literature, I enjoyed the Bulgarian epic novel *Sub la Jugo* of Ivan Vazov; the comic plays *Sep Fratoj* and *La Botistoj* by the

founder of modern Finnish literature, Aleksis Kivi; a collection of modern Japanese short stories; and the short stories of the great modern Chinese writer Lusin. Special insights can come from reading works from such lesser-known literatures. For example, I was struck by the pessimism of much East European literature. Vazov's major novel deals with the failure of a revolt against the Turks in the late 1800's. The contrast with traditional American optimism is striking.

A wide variety of periodicals is published in Esperanto. One of the most attractive and interesting periodicals is the monthly *El Popola Ĉinio* ("From People's China") published in Beijing. It is full of colour photos and quite diverse articles and special features. An independent magazine is the monthly *Monato*, published in Belgium, which draws its articles from writers all around the world. There is a bimonthly magazine *Kontakto* published by and for young people, with each issue devoted to an important theme, such as the family, or disarmament. Recently *Kontakto* has started printing some articles with limited vocabulary to interest young people who are learning Esperanto.

The spoken language is cultivated by means of visiting foreigners in their homes and through the many conferences held each year which use Esperanto, including a major yearly conference and cultural festival which is held in a different country each year. Both radio Warsaw and Radio Beijing broadcast a half-hour program in Esperanto several times a day, and weekly or more frequent broadcasts come from Bern, Rome, the Vatican, and Vienna. There are extensive tape libraries containing scientific, cultural, historical, and pedagogical materials. Records and tapes of Esperanto songs are also available.

Global awareness

An important benefit of Esperanto study in our schools is the global perspective that the language and its culture can give the learner. The ready availability of books, periodicals, and tapes from all over the world gives rise to a unique flavor of internationalism that is hard to provide in any other way. This breadth is an important complement to the depth of study of a single foreign language and culture such as German or Russian. It avoids the danger of replacing a monocultural view merely with a bicultural one, and it can instead

make a major contribution to helping students perceive the pluralistic nature of our new world. The study of foreign literature in Esperanto translation can give the learner excellent access to the literatures and cultures of the smaller nations, which are far too often slighted in our schools and colleges.

Staff also could share in these cultural benefits. In recent years there have been multinational teaching experiments involving Esperanto in European schools (Sonnabend 1979). The participation of North American schools would be warmly welcomed in such research, which would add an intriguing facet to curriculum studies.

Judging from interest shown by students from fields as diverse as engineering and languages in a linguistics course taught by the linguist Prof. C.C. Cheng and myself, which deals with general aspects of international communication as well as with Esperanto (Sherwood & Cheng 1980), it would be natural to include in any Esperanto course some discussion of such matters as language policies in the United Nations and the European Community, status of English, French, and Russian as transnational languages, etc.

Communicative aspects

Pen-pal exchanges with school classes in other countries are easily available through classified advertisements in Esperanto periodicals (including the newsletter of the American Association of Teachers of Esperanto) and through a clearing house in Europe. The possibility of starting such exchanges earlier than usual, and with most of the world available to the students, should make such exchanges especially stimulating.

Increasingly, young people have opportunities for foreign travel. It can easily happen that when the opportunity presents itself it may not involve a country where a national language studied by the student in school is spoken. But a network of contact people in most major and many minor cities of the world makes it easy to visit Esperanto speakers in their homes and to practice the spoken language with foreigners. In fact, this arrangement provides in many cases a much more intimate contact than can be found when touring a foreign country, even with a knowledge of its language. Europe and Japan have many conferences, study sessions, and even ski-trips designed for Esperanto-speaking young people. There is also a network

of homes which will house an Esperanto-speaking visitor for nominal cost or without charge.

Now that there are starting to be scientific conferences which use Esperanto as a working language, our children may find increasing opportunities in later professional life to use the language for a wide range of purposes. For example, the national computer society of Hungary sponsored an international computer conference in Budapest in December 1982, at which Esperanto was the official language.

Present status of Esperanto teaching

In the last few years Esperanto has been taught in an increasing number of North American schools and colleges, in response to heightened interest in international affairs. Colleges and universities where Esperanto is taught for credit at present include San Francisco State University, University of California at San Diego, Brigham Young University, Principia College (Illinois), Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Wilmington College (Ohio), and the University of Sherbrooke (Quebec). While Esperanto has been and is taught informally in many public schools, formal credit classes have recently been initiated in New York City and Philadelphia. Pirlot (1982) has compiled data about the teaching of Esperanto around the world. Wood (1975) provides a review of methods and experiences.

Teaching materials and personnel

A fairly wide selection of materials suitable for school and college Esperanto courses is available. Of particular interest are textbooks used in recent multinational European school experiments. Because these books were designed to be used in many different countries, they are written entirely in Esperanto.

The linguistics course at the University of Illinois uses the textbook *Teach Yourself Esperanto* (Cresswell & Hartley 1968) which is deficient in having only readings not dialogues, and which contains very little about literary and other aspects of Esperanto. It nevertheless is a useful and usable textbook which is widely available. It also has the advantage that excellent PLATO® computer-based lessons have been written by Judith Sherwood (1981) to accompany the first third of the book. These lessons and other computer-based materials are

used in the linguistics course and include crossword puzzles, standard and specialized vocabulary drills, games, and reading exercises with an online dictionary. There has been experimental work on electronic speech synthesis as an aid to Esperanto learning (J. Sherwood & B. Sherwood, 1982; B. Sherwood 1981). In France electronic speech recognition has been used to teach Esperanto pronunciation (Giorgetti-Mas, 1982; summarized in J. Sherwood & B. Sherwood, 1982).

The Esperanto League for North America, the Canadian Esperanto Association, the British Esperanto Association, the Universal Esperanto Association, and numerous other Esperanto organizations carry extensive selections of textbooks, dictionaries, literature, tapes and recordings (see addresses at the end of this document). Of particular interest for school use is the collection *Dekkvin Komedietoj*, consisting of fifteen humorous sketches suitable for class production.

While not a language textbook, Pierre Janton's book (1973) gives an excellent overview of the structure of Esperanto, its status, and its culture. This book is expected to appear in English translation soon. It would be of particular interest to teachers.

If Esperanto study is combined with some discussion of the general problem of international communication and the language problem, Mario Pei's book *One Language for the World* is useful (though apparently now out of print). It sets forth the advantages of choosing one language to be taught universally as everyone's second language and discusses the pros and cons of that language being a national language, an ancient language, a simplified national language, or a constructed language. In this book Pei does not favor one solution over another, but later he argued strongly for Esperanto (Pei 1969).

Who might teach a new school or college Esperanto course? The best choice would be an interested person who is already teaching a foreign language. The simplicity of Esperanto is such that the language could be mastered by such a teacher very rapidly. A big boost could be obtained from attendance at one of the San Francisco State University intensive summer courses (elementary, intermediate, or advanced). Recently there have been teacher-training institutes in New York City. In many cities there are knowledgeable speakers of Esperanto who could help teachers study Esperanto culture, in terms of its history, literature, and so on. While there may be problems in

starting up new Esperanto courses, they are much less acute than those associated with starting up a course in other newly-taught languages such as Arabic or Japanese, since suitable textbooks and other teaching materials are readily available.

The American Association of Teachers of Esperanto publishes a newsletter of interest to instructors and holds meetings at the annual conferences of the Esperanto League for North America and of the Modern Language Association.

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Note: All documents in this series carry a serial number keying them to the relevant section in the work *Esperanto en Perspektivo*. The EP number of this document is 4.1.

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Publication list of Esperanto Documents

No. Title

1. Unesco and the UEA (out of print)
2. Universal Esperanto Association, Annual Report 1974-75 (out of print)
3. The 60th Universal Congress of Esperanto
4. The development of poetic language in Esperanto
5. The contribution of the Universal Esperanto Association to world peace
6. An introduction to Esperanto studies
7. Esperanto on the air
8. The Universal Esperanto Association in International Women's Year 1975
9. International travel by speakers of Esperanto
10. Universal Esperanto Association, Annual Report 1975-76
11. Language problems and the Final Act (out of print)
12. Esperanto and the Universal Esperanto Association
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14. Esperanto and older people
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28. Current work in the linguistics of Esperanto
29. Esperanto and literary translation
30. Esperanto and the International Year of Disabled Persons 1981
31. The educational value of Esperanto study: an American view
32. Unesco and the UEA 1976-1982

Several of the above documents are also available in French or Esperanto.

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ESPERANTO BOOKS AND DICTIONARIES
IN ENGLISH
A selective list

Prices are as at Sept. 1983. Postage and packing: 20 % (minimum Hfl. 5.00)

Background information
Zamenhof, Creator of Esperanto Marjorie Boulton. Biography of Zamenhof by a widely read English author. Includes details of the spread of Esperanto after Zamenhof's death and its persecution under Hitler. 12 + 223 p. Illus. Hfl 23.10.

➔

Textbooks
Teach Yourself Esperanto Crosswell and Hartley. A volume in the UK "Teach Yourself" series. An introduction to all facets of the language, in 16 lessons in popular style. Perhaps the most widely used textbook for private study. 205 p. Illus. Hfl 12.00.

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Records, tapes, cassettes
Esperanto pronunciation disc Wells. The speaker is lecturer in phonetics at London University, and member of the Esperanto Academy. Model pronunciation. 45 rpm, mono. Hfl 3.90.

Jen nia mondo Wells et al. Amusing course, consisting of series of lessons originally used for radio. Speakers of various nationalities. Course book (2 + 56 p. Illus.) Hfl 10.50 Cassette Hfl 24.00.

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Dictionaries
Esperanto and English dictionary Wells. The companion volume to the "Teach Yourself" textbook, with introduction containing concise notes on grammar and usage. 419 p. Hfl 22.50.